



THE INQUIRER

£1 | Issue 7973 | 19 October 19

The voice of British and Irish Unitarians and Free Christians



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THE INQUIRER

The Unitarian and Free Christian Paper

Established in 1842, The Inquirer is the oldest nonconformist religious newspaper.

"To promote a free and inquiring religion through the worship of God and the celebration of life; the service of humanity and respect for all creation; and the upholding of the liberal Christian tradition."

From the Object passed at the General Assembly of the Unitarian and Free Christian Churches 2001

The Inquirer is published fortnightly by The Inquirer Publishing Company (2004), Registered Charity 1101039.

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Cover: Shutterstock photo

Articles express the views of their writers. Submissions are welcome and may be edited for content and length. They should be emailed or typed and should be the writer's original work or be attributed appropriately.

Annual subscriptions are £38 with discounts for bulk orders. Cheques payable to 'The Inquirer'.

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Advertise for £6 per column cm, on 3-col page, plus VAT or £7.50 per col cm, on a 2-col page. A one-page supplement is £200. One column on a 2-col page is £100, on a 3-col page, £75. A5 fliers may be inserted for £95 plus VAT. Contact the editor for details.

Births, marriages and deaths: 50p a word + VAT.

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Inquiring Words...

"You do not need to know precisely what is happening, or exactly where it is all going. What you need is to recognise the possibilities and challenges offered by the present moment, and to embrace them with courage, faith and hope."

Thomas Merton

It's in the post

When we had Millie, our rescue Jack Russell terrier, she would bark and launch herself at our front door every time she heard the postman outside. It shook on its hinges as she gouged marks into the wood. So, the odd days when the postman knocked the door, I would lock Millie away before opening it up.

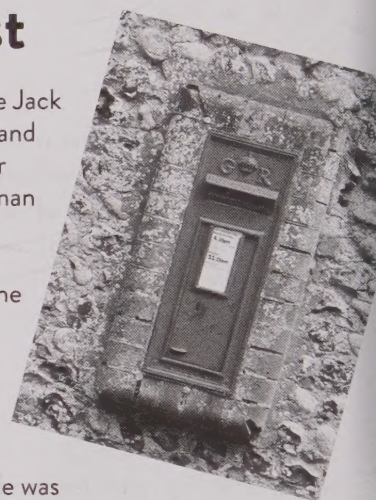
I was expecting my chum Sarah to come round for a cup of tea one day when Millie was spending some time at the veterinarian's. When I heard a knock at the door, it was so weird not to have Millie barking, that I filled the silence with a couple of barks of my own – for a joke. Then I opened the door, only to see the postman standing there with eyes big as saucers. I didn't even know how to explain, so I left it. But I suspect I might have joined his list of oddballs. He retired soon after that, and Millie died. So things aren't quite as fraught around here when the post is delivered.

Our current postman never knew Millie. But he very kindly will stand still for a minute or two while our little black Lhasa-Apso Hildy licks his shins. (Yes, he's one of the ones who wears shorts in all weathers!)

But I have been thinking recently that we could all reduce the burden he bears when he comes to our house. One of the perks of this editorship is that I receive calendars and newsletters from up and down the country. I enjoy learning what's going on in congregations and fellowships. But it would be just as easy to read them if they were attached to emails. So, if the people who produce your newsletters could send them along attached to emails, our postman would have an easier time of it, and I could still learn what you are all up to.

MC Burns

Photo by Karen Arnold



Correction: Jenny Jacobs, a member of York Unitarians wrote the 5 October cover story titled, 'Is it time to stop eating meat'. While her byline was correct on the cover, it was wrong on the inside pages.

The gospel of Mark, written in similar times, guides us toward loving the world says **Bob Janis-Dillon**

What the end of the world feels like

The Gospel of Mark was written at the end of the world. OK, it wasn't the literal end of the world, but it sure felt like it for the writer or writers of Mark who, scholars believe, finalised the text around 70 AD. In that year, Roman forces besieged the city of Jerusalem, conquered it, and razed the sacred temple – house of the holy of holies – to the ground. Hundreds of thousands of Jews were slaughtered in Judea, along with many non-Jews who were in the wrong place at the wrong time. Josephus recounts how tens of thousands of Jews were sold into slavery, shipped to Rome, placed in households or businesses and treated as common property, the lowest of the low.

It wasn't the end of the world for everybody. Many in the Roman world, including some Jews and Christians, lived comfortable lives – but they must have been aware, vaguely at least, of the price of their comfort. They knew of the endless wars at the edge of the empire, and the commodification of the human spirit, and also the boatloads of people with expendable lives, the slaves up on crosses for defying their masters. Many of them felt a kind of restlessness, a sort of modernist detachment – for the Roman world was a modern world indeed, full of technological advances, a truly globalised society... and yet for all the progress of the Roman world, still there was an indeterminate feeling of disconnection from something deeply important.

What can Mark teach us today?

Let us ponder whether the gospel of Mark, a book written during a localised apocalypse at the height of the dynamically modern but fundamentally unstable Roman empire, can tell us anything about our embodied life today, during a climate apocalypse beginning to occur during the height of dynamically modern but fundamentally unstable global capitalism. I think it might. But before delving into the text, I want to begin with our own felt, embodied experience. Consider, for a moment, what it feels like to go through a time that feels like the end of the world, in our own bodies. Perhaps this sounds familiar. When I think about the future,

“I’m worried. I’m scared. I feel powerless. I feel guilty that I’m not doing more – and guilty that I’m doing too much; too much driving, flying, buying plastic.”

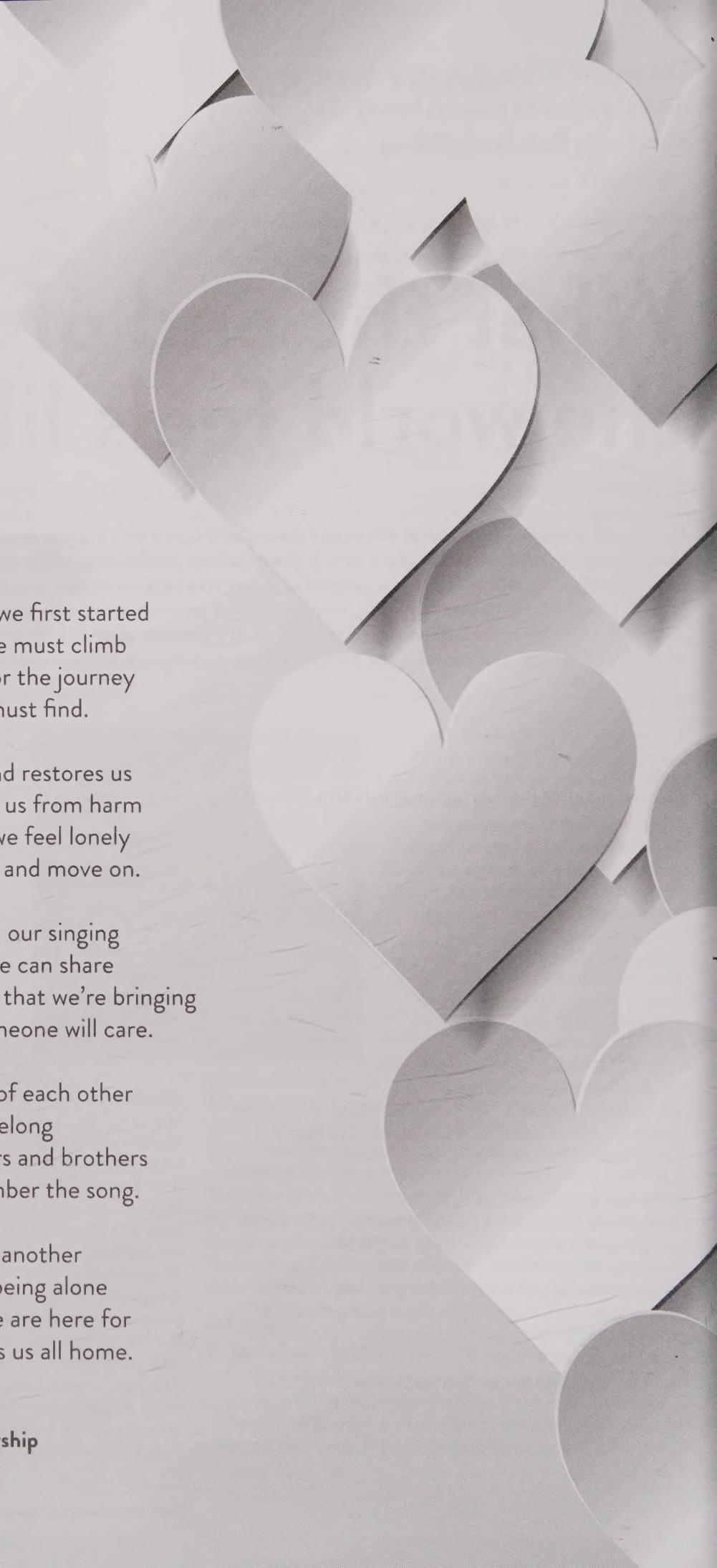
in all its uncertainty, I’m worried. I’m scared. I feel powerless. I feel guilty that I’m not doing more – and guilty that I’m doing too much; too much driving, flying, buying plastic and then throwing it out again. I go a bit numb sometimes and then I feel like I might be dangerously near being blasé. I’ve been given every advantage in life – a white male, never been desperately poor, had a good-enough upbringing – what right do I have to be morose?

The urge toward hopelessness

And yet I feel it – this oncoming something. I feel this urge toward hopelessness, even as I try to navigate the shoals of everyday life.

My kids ask for a second scoop of ice cream and I feel like a bad parent when I remember they didn’t eat much of their dinner, and I’m trying to be the responsible parent and tell them no, when I also remember that *the whole world is coming to a freaking end*. The forests are on fire and the seas are gathering plastic and rising, and here are my children, dropped in the midst of this ridiculous future. It ends up that they have a lot of second helpings, and thirds, which I’m not going to apologise for. Many days I hold my children tight, as if we are huddled together against the cold. I don’t know what to tell them, really. Does any of that ring true for you? Back to the book: the gospel of Mark was likely written about 35 years after the death of the historical Jesus, by an unknown author or authors (the name Mark is just a guess). A sort-of love letter to a dead man, the earliest gospel is a

Continued on page 6 >



Love

Love is the landmark where we first started
Love is the high peak that we must climb
Love is our food and drink for the journey
Love is the shelter that we must find.

Love is the rest that heals and restores us
Love is the shield that keeps us from harm
Love is what holds us when we feel lonely
Love is the freedom to grow and move on.

Love is our joy, our laughter, our singing
Love is the friendship that we can share
Love is the message of hope that we're bringing
Love is the knowing that someone will care.

Love is the light in the eyes of each other
Love is the feeling that we belong
Love ripples out to our sisters and brothers
Love helps the singer remember the song.

Love is what binds us one to another
Love is what keeps us from being alone
Love is our purpose, what we are here for
Love is the beacon that leads us all home.

**Jean MacMaster, friend
of the Swindon Unitarian Fellowship**

Words don't keep newcomers – actions do, says **Ralph Catts**

It's about what we do



A question often asked by newcomers to Unitarian Chapels is what is meant by Unitarian?

The first step in making a response could be to ask what attracted them to enter the chapel in the first place.

Sometimes it is by word of mouth when they come with a friend, or on a recommendation of a friend. Other times people have seen a notice about an event or a particular topic of worship, or decide to experience meditation that is offered. In other cases, it is at a moment of concern, or even crisis in the person's life.

In each case our response to the question needs to be consistent with what we actually do to express our faith and our values, because that can determine whether the newcomer stays or leaves. You may note that in the above I referred to what 'we' do, not what the minister or lay leader does, because as James Luther Adams said in *The Prophethood of All Believers* published in 1986, ours is a ministry of all believers. Note also that I said 'what we do', not what we believe. In a spiritual community that encourages each person to seek meaning and direction in our lives, we should not prescribe what each individual should believe, but rather we should ask that each person put their faith into practice.

In my experience people will elect to stay and to become involved to the extent that our actions accord with the principles that guide the community. Some folk enthusiastically embrace the Unitarian community because their first impressions are such a marked contrast to their prior experiences, while others can take much longer to test out the depth and sincerity of our practices. However, in either case, it is the actions of the current members of the chapel that make the difference.

You will notice that I make no reference to the diverse views about spiritual philosophy and theology which attract some attention in Unitarian circles. Across the UK, our churches use many terms to describe their faith perspectives including 'Free Christian', 'Unitarian Christian', Unitarian, and Spiritual Humanist. These distinctions are important to many people who are active members of our chapels, but they are not usually – in my experience – what primarily attracts newcomers. To quote W Whitaker, a chronicler of the Bowl Alley Lane Chapel, *'The modern conception of development enables us to see how the forms of thought which religion once found natural, may become obsolete, and yet leave intact the great truths which they enshrine'*. Despite being written in 1910 – more than 100 years ago – as a reflection of the changes in the beliefs of dissenting chapels over the previous 200 years, I believe that these comments remain valid today.

The great truths or principles that guide Unitarian faith include equality for all, offering and expecting mutual respect, especially for people of different cultural and faith traditions, a commitment to help one another, both within the chapel community and beyond, and a commitment to seek meaning and direction in our lives and to support and sustain others in their quest. Our principles also include a reverence for the environment, which in the Findhorn community is known as 'co-creation with nature'. All these principles need to be demonstrated in our individual and community practice.

If people like what they experience when they first encounter Unitarians, they may want to learn more both about how we apply these principles in our current practice, and about how we came by this approach to being a spiritual community. In a majority of our chapels there is no minister, and even among those chapels that have a minister in post, the office holder is often hard-pressed both by pastoral and spiritual demands, as well as more mundane tasks of maintaining the fabric and the governance of the chapel. What is more, especially in chapels with smaller numbers, there may not be the diversity of experiences and practices to illuminate the potential for growth and development. This leads me to conclude that we need an online Unitarian studies course which is fit for purpose, and which offers people the chance to learn about Unitarian principles and how they have evolved, but also encourages folk to put these principles into action in their local communities.

Ralph Catts



The Rev Dr Ralph Catts recently retired as minister with the Hull Unitarians. He is also involved with the Findhorn Unitarian Network.

Jesus, the reluctant healer

Continued from page 3 >

biography of sorts, though most of the events of Jesus' life are left out. Chronological accuracy and historical accuracy were of little concern to the author. Compared to the other gospels, the earliest gospel is missing a lot of what we consider familiar material: the birth narratives, aka the Christmas story; most of the memorable parables; the staggering, gorgeous wisdom of the sermon on the mount; the Lord's Prayer; the appearance of the risen Jesus – all are missing. This last omission, of the resurrected Christ, so shocked Christian editors they added extra endings decades after the original text.

It's OK to be sceptical about the miracles

So what is in Mark? There are miracles – plenty of them. The blind seeing; the deaf hearing and speaking unimpeded; demons and vile energies exorcised from bodies. What are we to make of the miracles? Written 30+ years after the death of Jesus, it's probably not an eyewitness account. It was written when medical science was certainly not what it is today. So if you want to be sceptical about the miracles, I don't blame you.

Perhaps the early Christians were sceptical, too. Or maybe they weren't. Regardless of what individuals thought about the miracles, the *embodied* experience of early Christian communities was the sense of a healing power at work in the world. When they gathered together they felt a better world was possible. Maybe they needed to believe it. Maybe they were desperate. Life can be so cruel, so capricious – aches and pains and regrets and woes so real. Maybe they needed to believe in the power of the body, not just the individual body, but the collective body, to perform *Tikkun Olam*, the Jewish idea of healing the world.

The stories weren't just told. They were lived. When early Christian communities gathered, they shared a meal – not a wafer and a glass of wine, but a feast, a lived reminder of Jesus feeding the multitudes with loaves and fishes. They'd eat together and talk together and laugh together, and share what they had. And they'd believe that anything is possible. We live in such a topsy-turvy world. As part of my ministry I was privileged to spend a few days in Samos, a Greek Island near Turkey, with refugees from Syria, Iraq, and North Africa. We were part of a multi-faith, multi-national, multi-ethnic group trying to help out, to do what we could. It was humbling. A few days was not enough time. Some of the refugees – beautiful faces, wonderful families – were so

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traumatised by life that they were carefully wary of saying anything to anyone. But a few went out of their way to thank me, which felt beautiful and agonising at the same time. These dear ones had travelled halfway across the world, carrying their children. They risked death on an inflatable life raft, with life preservers – often fakes sold to them as life preservers but not actually buoyant. And what had I done? For God's sake, I was handing out toothbrushes. Flown across the world for some awareness training at best, a Greek holiday at worst. I was almost ashamed to be thanked.

But I was there, so I did what I could.

One night huge winds and rain hit the makeshift camp, and a lot of the temporary infrastructure fell over – canvas tents were whisked away in the wind. We were all a bit frantic, and someone had the idea of getting soup for everyone. Because even though it was cold, at least it was food, and it was halal so all of us could eat it. The rain beat down on us and I was trying to deliver these polystyrene cups of soup, with a tiny slice of white bread. I was making such a hash of that simple – probably unnecessary – task that a couple of the families started helping. Because they didn't know what to do, either. Everybody drenched, all of us scared, everybody miserable. And as I rushed about trying to make myself useful (and mostly failing), I knew in my body, even before I put it into words, that this was the closest I would ever get to the kingdom of heaven.

Finding an unknown courage

They say this world may need a miracle to escape the worst effects of climate change. I don't know much about miracles. But it has been my experience as a Unitarian that at certain sacred times in our congregational life, there are moments when I feel, in my body, that we can do something. And I feel a courage I didn't know I possessed. And my Unitarian friends have inspired me to want to live into my courage more, and truly believe ourselves capable of healing the world. Have you ever felt that? It's important – when it comes to saving and savouring the world – that we *believe*. At the time when humanity has changed the content of the oceans and the sky, has burned the forest and scarred the surface of the earth – just at the time we've changed *everything* – there's a message going around that we can't change the system. 'That's just the way it is', that cynical message goes. It's all too convenient. Don't believe it. Find a better belief than that cynical, death-serving nonsense. One interesting facet of the miracles, in Mark, was that



“I knew in my body, even before I put it into words, that this was the closest I would ever get to the kingdom of heaven.”

Shown left: Refugee boys on Samos.
Photo by Bob Janis-Dillon

Jesus, surprisingly, is rarely anxious to heal people. He does perform healings, when people approach him and ask. Often, in Mark, he tells them it is *they* who healed themselves – ‘your trust has perfected you’ (or more traditionally translated, ‘your faith has made you well’). But he’s not on a mission to make every deaf person in Galilee hear, or everyone able to walk. He seems peculiarly unbothered about that.

Avoid the pitying line of Christianity

There’s been quite a bit of important criticism of the Christian tradition from differently abled Christians (and differently abled non-Christians), in effect saying, ‘I may be blind by society’s definition, but I don’t feel “less than”. I don’t want Christians to look down on me, pity me from the pews, and say, “Aww, if only Jesus was around, he could heal that poor blind person.” Or, “well, it’s OK, she’ll see in heaven.”’ Many differently abled people have responded to this pitying line of Christian thinking, ‘Actually this is who I am. I don’t mind being blind, in fact I hear much better than you do, and I have a beautiful perspective on the world. I don’t want you to look down on me with condescension.’ Actually I think Jesus, in Mark, understands that perspective. He heals those who ask, but he first wants to acknowledge that they are. Already. Whole. Already whole, already just fine. They don’t *need* healing. They are beautiful. When Jesus was in a house in Capernaum, crowds seeking healing thronged the house. A group of friends carried a paralysed man to Jesus in a stretcher. They couldn’t get to the front door, so these friends took the roof off the house to carry their friend to Jesus. The Gospel states that Jesus took note of *their* faith (it’s important, that it is *their* faith, and not anyone’s individual faith).

You are not less than

I can picture Jesus laughing, with compassion, at the lovingly ridiculous scene of these people so eager to help their friend that they took the roof off. And Jesus says, ‘child,

your shortcomings have been taken from you’ (that’s my translation) or ‘your sins have been forgiven you’. The folk belief of the time was that a paralysed person must have done something bad to deserve such a fate. Maybe in a past life, if not in this one. Jesus doesn’t heal the paralysed man right away. He looks at him and his friends and says, ‘you know what, mate, you’re cool. I see you. There’s nothing wrong with you at all. I mean, you can’t walk. You have challenges. I know that. But all your life people have told you that you are “less than” because you’re paralysed. You are not less than. You are beautiful.’

The miracle came later

Later in the story Jesus performed a miracle, and the man walked. But that’s rather less important.

I have no idea whether early Christian communities took these stories literally, metaphorically, psychologically or symbolically. I am certain they believed – believed in the power of human beings to heal our broken world. In a world falling apart all around them, keeping that belief alive was all important.

Tune in next issue for an account of the teachings of the Jesus of Mark: a Jewish prophet who promoted the ecological nature of humankind.



Bob Janis-Dillon

The Rev Bob Janis-Dillon is minister with the Merseyside Unitarian Ministry Partnership. This piece is from a talk he gave at Hucklow Unitarian Summer School. For more information see: www.hucklowsummerschool.co.uk

A failed approach to drug misuse is exacerbated by cuts says

Paul Wheeler

Addicts are not criminals

There were 4,359 deaths related to drug poisoning in England and Wales last year, the highest number and the highest annual increase (16%) since records were first kept in 1993.

Of those deaths, 2,917 – around 56 people a week – were from drug misuse.

Deaths involving cocaine doubled between 2015 and 2018 to their highest-ever level, while the numbers involving new psychoactive substances, formerly known as 'legal highs', returned to their previous levels after halving in 2017. MDMA deaths are now also at their highest rate ever.

These dramatic rises cannot be unconnected to the swingeing cuts which our national Government has made to local Council funding since 2010. Those cuts have led to large reductions in funding for outreach services aimed at supporting those addicted to drugs. There were 4,359 deaths related to drug poisoning in England and Wales last year, the highest number and the highest annual increase (16%) since records were first kept in 1993.

Mike Dixon, chief executive of drug and alcohol charity Addaction, said of the dramatic rise in drug misuse deaths: 'The reality is that outreach services barely exist anymore.' He went on to say, 'We need to go where people are. When we wait for people to come to us, too many of them don't make it.'

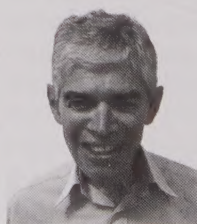
Yet whilst funding for services that offer help to drug addicts is undoubtedly important, the more fundamental problem is the Government persisting in the failed approach of treating drug misuse as a criminal justice issue rather than a public health issue.

Shirley Cramer CBE, chief executive of the Royal Society for Public Health, backs a fundamental change of approach. 'The case for a more compassionate harm-reduction approach has now been clear for years – and yet the government has continued to lead with tough rhetoric around law enforcement, all the while presiding over sustained cuts to local authority budgets, undermining their ability to deliver effective drug treatment services', she said. It is clear from experience in this country and throughout the world that you cannot stop people taking drugs by criminalising their use. People have always used drugs and that is not going to change. But drugs can be dangerous and therefore need to be regulated. Regulation is about managing risk and reducing harm, particularly in the case of the young and most vulnerable.

Moving to a regulated approach to drugs would offer benefits on many fronts.

1. Promoting health – Prohibition makes drug use dirty and dangerous. Through regulation we can treat drug use as a health issue.

2. Improving justice – At present people who use drugs are criminalised. Regulation would ensure that people whose drug use is problematic would not have the additional problem of a criminal record. Our prison population would fall significantly.
3. Protecting young people – Drugs are available everywhere – in cities, towns and rural areas. There are no age controls in the illegal drugs trade. Criminals do not ask for proof of age. Regulation would make it harder for young people to access drugs.
4. Improving security – Illegal drugs are part of the wider criminal world and their illegality draws users in to a web of violence and corruption. Regulation would significantly reduce the exposure of users to the criminal world.
5. Releasing resources – Policing the drug prohibition regime is very expensive. A legal, strictly controlled, drugs market would generate tax revenue and create jobs. Regulation would free up resources for health and education around drug use.
6. To advocate regulation in place of prohibition is not to deny the dangers of drugs; it is to recognise that this risky activity is going to continue, so the priority should be reducing the harm to users and society generally.



Paul Wheeler

Paul Wheeler is a member of Unitarian Meeting, Bristol and is a member of the Penal and Social Affairs Panel.

What is your pearl?

At a recent 'Living the Questions' meeting we explored how art speaks to us. Art has a way to reach those parts of ourselves, deep in our hearts, that other media perhaps cannot. Maybe this is why we value it so much. During the conversation one of the attendees told of a limited-edition copy of a piece of Bob Dylan's art that cost him a lot of money and that he was paying for in instalments.

The price of art had been in the news earlier that day. A piece by Banksy had sold for almost £10,000,000. It eclipsed anything else he had produced in the past by more than fivefold. No doubt the piece went up in value because of its subject. It goes by the title 'Devolved Government' and is an image of a parliament of chimpanzees arguing in the 'House of Commons'. I don't believe it would have raised such a price a few months earlier.

As talented as Banksy is, and regardless of his mystique and clever promotional work – and regardless of the satire of the piece – how the heck can a painting be worth £10,000,000? It just seems obscene to me. And it's not just paintings and other art treasures that seem valued way beyond reason. Football is another example. I love football, but surely no footballer is worth £200,000,000. It seems ridiculous but this is the market value for the best of the best.

Now I am sure there are things that we all value above anything else in life, that we treasure beyond measure. I wonder, what is it that you treasure most? What is beyond value in your life, your pearl of great price, for which you would sell all that you have? Is there anything or anyone you treasure so much that you would give everything for? Something to ponder, perhaps. Some folk devote their whole lives to these things that they treasure the most. The great stories of human history speak of heroes going on epic journeys in search of great treasures. Telling tales of questing at some perceived new frontier. Think of Arthurian legends, particularly the quest for the Holy Grail. Think of the biblical accounts, Moses and the Israelites, or Jesus's journey into the wilderness for 40 days and 40 nights, a journey of sacrifice and transformation. Or perhaps the Native American initiation tradition of Vision Quests. Such journeys often include climbs to the summit of mountains, like the climb to the summit of Parnassus, the ancient mount of the Muse. While watching the rugby broadcast from Japan I noticed the symbol depicting Mount Fuji with the Red Sun rising behind it. Mount Fuji was considered to be the point of contact between heaven and the underworld. It's not just the great heroes who go on such quests. Ordinary people do too. Increasingly people are going on pilgrimage. Such pilgrimages can be beautifully transformative. There is, though, a far more important pilgrimage. This is the pilgrimage to the heart. Not a physical journey but a deeply arduous one. I suspect this is our greatest treasure of all, our hearts. All life stems from and through the heart. In ancient times it was believed that the heart was the centre of human intelligence and the seat of the soul. It is through the heart that we begin to connect to our truest and deepest selves. By connecting to our deepest selves – and thus awakening our hearts – we begin to act in loving, meaningful ways in the world. Without our hearts, we will not act with

FROM NOTHING TO EVERYTHING

By Danny Crosby



compassion. We will not act with true reason without the heart. In fact, reason can be deadly without compassion, without being led by the heart. This is the true pilgrimage, the journey to the heart.

As Howard Thurman once said, 'the longest journey is between the heart and the head'. Thurman, the great mystic, theologian and educator was critical of the tendency in the modern age to separate the heart from the intellect. It is not only the body that is nourished through the heart, but our whole humanity. This is why it is so vital to take care of our physical heart, but also the heart of our spirit. This requires an inner pilgrimage, that of silence.

Silence has become an import and treasured aspect of my worshipping life. I spend time in communal silence several times a week. It enables me to reach that treasure at the core of myself, at the core of others, too. It is as vital to my life as food, water and exercise.

We shared a special moment in silence recently at Dunham Road Unitarian Chapel. Some 30 or more human hearts – and perhaps 20 dogs – all shared in reverential silence for several minutes in the middle of the 'Blessing of the Animals' service. You could feel a deep power at work in this pure silence, so deep I could almost hear our hearts beating. It was one of the most beautiful silences I have ever shared – although when I think of it I have shared many such moments with strangers and friends throughout this year. It has been the year of the heart.

Last Sunday I was not the only one to feel it either. Several people commented to me afterwards just how special the experience was. Fifty hearts beating as one. Is there a greater treasure in life? It was a beautiful spiritual journey to share together as we entered the caves of our hearts and helped awaken something beautiful within each and every one of us.

We each have a great treasure within us, a treasure that needs to be nurtured and cared for and brought to life. It's a treasure that the world needs us to share. We need to take care of this priceless treasure, and live from it. If we do, we may just begin to bring alive that love that is Divine. To bring the Kin-dom of love alive that dwells within each and every one of us, in everything.

The Rev Danny Crosby is minister at Altrincham and Urmston.

Letters to the Editor



Ipswich Meeting House needs support

Tessa Forsdike

Ipswich Unitarian Meeting House Trustee

To the Editor › We know that many Unitarian Chapels and Meeting Houses rise to the challenge of keeping their buildings repaired. We in Ipswich are no different ... except that our building, dating from 1699 is Grade 1 listed and currently needs work done to restore and protect it for future generations to the tune of £500,000, which is a big challenge. We have raised funds successfully for this work over the last couple of years, but as a small congregation we also need

support from grants. We have already received the maximum possible grant of £10,000 from Historic England and are about to apply for a large grant from Viridor at the end of October. At short notice we have been asked to supply written evidence from people with an interest in our historic building to show that the grant funding is not only given to support our congregation, but also the wider community. The more letters and emails we can gather, the more likely it is we will attract the grants we need. So I appeal on behalf of the Ipswich Unitarian congregation for any readers of *The Inquirer* who know our beautiful building and would like to support us, to send an email (to tessa@tessajordan.co.uk) or letter (to Ipswich Unitarian Meeting House, c/o Tessa Forsdike, 48 Crabbe Street, Ipswich IP4 5HS). Feel free to write your own message – which could be as simple as this template:

To Whom It May Concern:

We are very pleased to have the opportunity to express our support for the fund-raising efforts that are necessary to undertake urgent repairs to the Ipswich Unitarian Meeting House. We hope that funders will recognise the vital importance of the building to the local community and its contribution to life in Ipswich. (Any personal additions you would like to make)

Yours faithfully,

Your name

We are very grateful for all the support you can offer – and if you are able to send your reply quickly, that will help us to meet the grant application submission date of 28 October. If you are unable to meet that deadline, do please still send your message, as we will have further applications. We will of course let you know how successful we are with our bid for financial help. Thank you all.



Zippering along at 80

Joyce Ashworth

Rochdale Unitarians

To the Editor › As with most 'good ideas', it started with an overheard chance remark. 'I'd like to do something special to mark my 80th birthday.' 'Such as?', came the response. 'Not sure – I've always fancied flying like a bird – probably evoked through the imagery of frequently singing David Dawson's arrangement of the hymn *Flying Free*'.

The whole thing mushroomed when Abi Elliott-McGuffie, a member at Bury and Rochdale Unitarians, presented me with a ticket to zip down the longest line in Europe – Penrhyn Quarry in Snowdonia. So it was, that we embarked on this exhilarating escapade together.

We would both like to thank, most sincerely, all those Unitarian congregations, individuals and friends who so generously contributed towards the magnificent sponsorship figure which has now topped £4,000. As advertised, half of this has been donated to Rochdale church's roof repairs and the other half to Bury children's hospice, "Grace's Place". The hospice closed recently on account of insufficient funds. Our donation has been absorbed into a fund set up to enable families to be taken to treatment centres elsewhere.

A memory

Graham Murphy

Liverpool

To the Editor › Just to add a few words to Julian Smith's obituary of Tony Cross. (*Inquirer*, 21 September 2019) Tony had considerable skills of pastoral care.

He helped me, particularly in the '70s and '80s, a turbulent time in my native city and the church I served then. When he was principal, he made me a guest of Manchester (Harris) College over several vacations. It was a much-needed respite and an opportunity to read and write.

He was kind and generous and never intrusive.

REFLECTION

A visit to Gellionnen chapel

By Karl Stewart

How the value of just sitting back is a lesson, to be in the present. On a visit to friends of another Unitarian chapel, I saw that Sunday morning all the elements of church coming together.

I heard the chapel bustle; the sound of joy in voices greeting one another, the kettle clicking off in the background, the cups and saucers chiming as they're laid to the table, the cutting of stems as flowers were put in the vase; as flowers were brought to the altar.

As well, the quick chit-chat we're all used to before the service: 'so we don't forget, whilst you're here, sign this cheque, and the form for the accountant – have you done the return for the expenses?'

The chapel bustle as the preacher arrives, shortly followed by the pianist, and others arrive and you hear passing asides, and you are only too well aware of the intricate tapestry of relationships, when you see the different faces and gestures exchanged. You know only too well because of your own church family – there are those in the chapel bustle, who only just tolerate one another for an hour.

And typically, as commends our humanity, and as it is with

any faith family, we're only too glad to turn in sympathy and compassion with humility to help, when one of ours is in need.

Back to the chapel bustle, when the silence is asked, as the piano plays. Maybe this is where we listen to the spirit, and during the gathering we listen with the whole self. And after all is sung, played, listened to, the music plays again at the end. We can, with new understanding, listen to each other.

Whatever your role, be it tea-making, treasury, cleaning, sorting, fixing of things, secretary, chair, trustee, pastoral phone carer or visitor – wherever you play a part in the chapel bustle, you are one of a family sharing the ministry of love, care, compassion and humanity together. All we do matters as we live in the practice of the great gift of unconditional hospitality, as you give of what your heart and conscience can afford.

And I'm sure if you listen once well, you might hear everything, as your journey to discernment continues, over and over again. I hope, and this I ask of myself too, that we pray wholly, look widely and be at one with every step.

Karl Stewart is a member of Bristol Unitarians.

City founded by Unitarians celebrates 450th

By Derek McAuley

The small Polish town of Raków played an important, but now largely unknown, part in the development of early Unitarianism. In 1569 a wealthy noble, John Sienieński, established the new settlement on his lands and welcomed the members of the Polish Brethren – Anti-Trinitarians known in Poland as Ariens. Under his son, Jacob, it developed as the chief centre of Unitarianism to serve the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth and beyond. It became known as a 'New Rome' or 'New Geneva' with a famous academy, open to boys of all faiths; a substantial chapel, a printing press and a paper mill. It was suppressed during the Counter-Reformation in 638 with those members of the Polish Brethren who would not convert to Catholicism expelled in 1660. Raków faded into obscurity.

In recent years there have been several study tours of Poland. This summer a group of more than twenty Unitarians and Unitarian Universalists from the USA, UK, Romania and Bulgaria as well as Poland visited Raków during a five day trip. In this 450th anniversary year of their founding a message of congratulations and support from the General Assembly to the people of Raków, signed by GA Chief Officer Liz Slade, was presented by her predecessor Derek McAuley to the town's Mayor, Damian Szpak. A similar message was also received from the President of the Unitarian Universalist Association, Susan Frederick-Gray, presented by Rev Dr Jay Atkinson, leader of the party. The tour group was pleased to host a dinner at the nearly Kurozweki Palace for members of the Society of Friends of the Raków and Swietokrzyski Region who have done so

much to preserve the unusual history of what is now a small fairly isolated town. We visited the local heritage centre and museum, which must be one of the few public secular locations anywhere where Unitarianism origins and history is celebrated! The tour also visited the cenotaph to Fausto Sozzini (Faustus Socinus from whom Socinianism is derived) in Lusławice in the gardens of a private estate now owned by Polish composer Krzysztof Penderecki as well as several former chapels, two used as granary barns.

Derek McAuley is former Unitarian Chief Officer.

Shown below: Derek McAuley presents a framed letter of support to Raków Mayor, Damian Szpak watched over by a gallery of Unitarian luminaries.





Scottish leaders gather

Scottish Unitarians were represented by the president of the Scottish Unitarian Association, Joan Cook, (second row, second from left) at a meeting of church leaders with the cabinet secretary for communities and local government, Aileen Campbell MSP at Holyrood. The meeting focused on ways in which the Scottish churches could work more effectively with the Scottish government, developments in tackling climate change, and the ways in which churches can support those in our communities from other European states, whose status may be affected by Brexit.

Photo provided by Joan Cook

CONTRIBUTE

Your original work about Christmas, Solstice, New Year, Hanukkah, Saturnalia

- Prayers
- Addresses
- Stories
- Meditations
- Visual art

For more information, or to submit material, email:

Inquirer@btinternet.com

Or, send typed contributions to the editor's postal address on page 2.

Material is due by 15 November

THE
INQUIRER

East Anglia Unitarians

On a hot sunny day in June, the Unitarian Meeting House in the small market town of Framlingham in the Suffolk countryside, was the destination for about 50 Unitarians from Bury St Edmunds, Cambridge, Gt Yarmouth, Ipswich, Norwich...and Framlingham!

The afternoon was organised by the East Anglian Unitarian Women's Group (EAUWG) and after a welcome from the Rev Matthew Smith, Minister to Framlingham and Bury St Edmunds congregations, the short service, arranged by Betty Rathbone and Lynne Davies commenced, taking as the subject 'Respecting and caring for the Soil'. With one exception, all the hymns, music and readings were composed by women and with the doors of the meeting house open, the renditions of 'Earth is Gift of God's Creation' and 'Come Together in Love', must surely have travelled the distance to Ed Sheeran's 'Castle on the Hill'. The service concluded with the organ voluntary 'Blow up the Trumpet' by Rosalie Bonighton (1946 – 2011). The retiring collection raised £161 for 'The International Tree Foundation' and their projects in the Sahel region of the Sahara. (www.internationaltreefoundation.org).

Next came a choice, about 20 people followed the Rev Cliff Reed around the Unitarian 'hotspots' in the town, which included a visit to the town cemetery wherein are buried the Rev Thomas Cooper, who after first-hand experience in Jamaica was a fervent abolitionist of the slave trade; John Goodwyn Barmby, Christian socialist & Unitarian minister, and in the Unitarian section of the cemetery, many of Cliff's former congregation! Others, quite content to stay within the cool of the meeting house, chatted with old acquaintances and met many new ones – a very positive situation within a Unitarian gathering!

The positive success of the meeting, the first social gathering since 2016, was seen in the length of time taken for the participants to disperse! It is to be hoped that in the coming year's individual congregations in East Anglia will arrange similar events and invite other Unitarians in East Anglia to join with them.

Linda King

Photo below by Maggie Hodges

